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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3134
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002928

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/28/2017
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SUBJECT: RRT ERBIL: PUK POLITBURO MEMBERS ON KIRKUK AND USG

Classified By: Regional Coordinator Jess Baily for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

This is a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) Cable.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Members of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) are committed to completing the provisions of Article 140 which addresses the status of the city of Kirkuk. They will not negotiate on changing the 2007 deadline for Article 140 implementation but hinted that they will allow for an extension to keep the process moving forward. With little acknowledgement of the practical matters involved in Article 140 normalization implementation, they cited funding issues and relations with Government of Iraq (GOI) officials as the main obstacle. Harkening back to past history (post World-War I, 1975, 1991), PUK politburo members expressed a fear of being abandoned by the USG and believe their geo-strategic situation makes them vulnerable to attack. The Kurds have an almost psychological need for a permanent US military and diplomatic presence in the Kurdistan region. END SUMMARY.

ARTICLE 140 IMPLEMENTATION

¶2. (C) On August 26, RRT Deputy Director and IPAO met with PUK politburo members Omer Said Ali and Jalal Jawher Ali at the Politburo headquarters in Sulaimaniyah. (Biographical notes below). Omer Said Ali told RRT Offs:

-- Kirkuk is Kurdish and always been; it must return to the Kurdistan Region.

-- Arabs can stay in Kirkuk and live in peace with the Kurds but they cannot vote to reclaim the territory.

-- The PUK will not negotiate on extending the formal deadline of Article 140 implementation.-- To keep the process of Article 140 implementation moving, the PUK would agree to carry out Article 140 measures past 2007.

OBSTACLES TO ARTICLE 140 IMPLEMENTATION

¶3. (C) For the PUK politburo members, money is the cause for delay in Article 140 implementation. The 200,000,000 Iraqi dinars (approximately 150,000,000 USD) set aside for normalization must be released. When the money is there, measures on property claims and border disputes will go forward. At one point, Jawher upped the ante by saying one billion dollars will solve the problem. (Note: normalization involves the return of internally displaced people, settlement of property disputes, and adjustment of borders changed under Saddam to reduce the number of non-Arabs in the province. End note.)

¶4. (C) PUK politburo members agreed that working with GOI officials is an obstacle to Article 140 implementation. The Sunnis are to blame for the failings of federalism in Iraq,

they noted. Said Ali said GOI officials have not taken steps to make the Article 140 implementation go easier and curb the violence in Kirkuk. He asked the USG to put pressure on GOI leaders to make progress on Article 140 implementation.

¶15. (C) The politburo members told RRTOffs that Kurdish residents of Kirkuk pushed the PUK leadership for Article 140 implementation. They added that the PUK is managing the Kurds to prevent them from taking action into their own hands against the Arabs. Said Ali warned RRT Offs that the people are impatient and want to reclaim the land. The Turkomen community also turned to the PUK for land and food, he stated. The area of Basheer, located outside Kirkuk is traditionally home to Turkomen, Said Ali continued, but Arabs live there now and have killed Turkomen who wanted to reclaim the land. Jawher told RRT Off later that he wished to speak in more detail on the Article 140 process in a separate meeting.

PERCEPTION OF USG

¶16. (C) Omer Said Ali said the Kurdish worry about being betrayed by the USG. Kurdistan is a nation of 25 million dispersed over Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, he noted. The Iraqi Kurdistan region has its own military, natural resources, and government but it is fearful of its Arab, Turkish and Iranian neighbors and sees itself "living like an island."

¶17. (C) The politburo members stressed to RRT Offs that the USA must see the Kurds as its greatest ally in the Middle East. They repeated that it is in the USG interest to establish a permanent US presence in Iraq, both politically

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and militarily.

COMMENT

¶18. (C) The politburo members displayed singularly unrealistic expectation on the practical requirements of implementing Article 140. The money does not address the logistical complexities and extended timeline necessary for working through the property claims, border issues, the census, and compensation matters. Politically and publicly, the PUK will not negotiate the 2007 deadline. However, their statements taken together implied a deeper tacit acceptance to let the schedule stretch beyond 2007. Long standing concerns of USG abandonment remain in PUK rhetoric as well as a steadfast desire for a permanent USG military and political presence in Iraqi Kurdistan.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

¶19. (SBU) Omer Said Ali is a member of the PUK Executive Bureau along with Mala Baxtiar, Head of Democratic Organization and Dr. Kamel Fouad, Head of PUK Finance. Said Ali was in Abu Gharib prison in 1977 and obtained amnesty in 1980, the same year he joined the Peshmerga. In 1981, he suffered a leg injury and sought treatment in Sweden where he stayed until 1985. In 1986, he returned to Sulaimaniyah and lived in the mountains with the Peshmerga and made occasional visits to Sweden for medical treatment. He is known to be anti-materialistic and maintains a simple lifestyle, foregoing comfortable homes and vehicles which his position provides for.

¶10. (SBU) Jawal Jawher is from Kirkuk and joined the Peshmerga in 1991. From 1991 to 1996 he was a PUK organization member. In 1997, he became Governor of Kirkuk, based in Darbandihkan, Sulaimaniyah Province (Kirkuk being under the control of Saddam at the time.) In 1998, he became Minister of Municipality, Sulaimaniyah. From 2000-2003 he

was Minister of Industry (PUK, Sulaimaniyah). In 2001, Jawher became a member of the PUK politburo. Since 2003, Jawher is responsible for Kirkuk affairs for the PUK. In Kirkuk, he created a bureau to deal with internally displaced persons. Jawher is currently responsible for the politburo's office for Observation and Investigations.

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